

PET PRODUCT MANUFACTURER USES LEAN TOOLS TO INCREASE COMMUNICATION AND PREPARE FOR EXPANSION

ABOUT HEALTHY PET. Healthy Pet manufactures natural fiber pet products. Based in Ferndale, Washington, the company opened a second location in Jesup, Georgia, to better serve their east coast customers, build redundancy, and develop pulp fiber relationships with Georgia mills. With over one hundred employees, the facility in Jesup repurposes excess pulp from local paper mills to make bedding for small animal habitats and specialty cat litter. This process keeps that matter from becoming waste and ending up in landfills, streams, or ponds. Healthy Pet often collaborates with local mills to advance their green initiatives, building on the strength of the local industry and its ability to improve the environment in a commercially viable manner.

THE CHALLENGE. Healthy Pet needed to expand the Jesup facility following its acquisition by J. Rettenmaier & Söhne Group, a global natural fiber processing company that is closely held and managed by the Rettenmaier family in Germany. Healthy Pet had an opportunity to pursue additional growth in the European market, as well as to introduce German-engineered wood substrates to the US marketplace. To ensure the success of the expansion, Healthy Pet contacted the Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership (GaMEP) at Georgia Tech, part of the MEP National Network™.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. A GaMEP project manager met with Jimmy Welch, Head of East Coast Operations, to discuss the needs of the company. Together, they planned a Lean program for Healthy Pet, beginning with a Value Stream Mapping event. A cross-functional team evaluated existing processes and brainstormed improvement ideas, and Healthy Pet used that information to determine the direction of their Lean journey and prepare for the expansion. "The Value Stream Map helped us look at things differently," said Welch. "We found bottlenecks in communication and created a much more efficient plan for sharing information. The returns on this effort were immediate." The engagement helped Healthy Pet identify opportunities for cost savings, as well as a need for additional supervisor training.

Next, GaMEP worked with the team to implement a Management for Daily Improvement (MDI) system, utilizing GEMBA boards and daily walks to improve communication and solve problems quickly. The project manager continued to follow up with the company, providing training modules every few months for supervisors and managers on topics such as accountability, time management, and communication strategies for a multi-generational workforce.

"Everybody is on the same page now—more so than anything I have seen in my past 15 years here. The system really stuck because we invited everyone to the table, not just upper-level management, which greatly increased buy-in. We've tried to implement communication and daily improvement strategies in the past, but working with GaMEP made all the difference."

-Jimmy Welch, Head of East Coast Operations.

RESULTS



Brainstormed **38** improvement ideas; prioritizing 7 based on strategic feasibility factors



Identified **\$1M** in cost savings opportunities



Preparing for expansion and automation projects totaling **\$9.3M** in investment

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